

Hoigaards Challenge Standings, Post Tri-Loppet Report:

Now that two of the three events of the Hoigaards Challenge have been completed, the standings are starting to take shape. In the men's field, the trip to Bearskin Lodge could belong to any of the top four competitors. All are within ten minutes of first place, which is currently held by Hoigaards Classic runner-up, Evan Pengelly of Plymouth.

Thanks to the five-minute cushion he established while taking second place in the Hoigaard's Classic at the Loppet, Pengelly still holds a two minute lead over 2009 Tri-Loppet champion, Zach Handler of Minneapolis. Knowing of Handler's win at the 2008 Trail Loppet (the third and final event of the Challenge) Pengelly says that it is his plan to, "keep [Handler] within arms length in order to guarantee the top time in the Challenge."

Looking at Pengelly's and Handler's run times in the Tri-Loppet, it appears that Pengelly may have a slight advantage at the Trail Loppet as he finished just over a minute ahead of Handler in the 2009 Tri-Loppet run. Besides the current top two, dark horses loom large with Duluth's Grant Nelson and Lakeville's Karl Schultz (both strong runners) sitting in third and fourth respectively. Schultz actually had the second fastest overall run time at the Tri-Loppet and was himself over one minute ahead of Pengelly in the Tri-Loppet run.

The women's field could also be taken by any of the top four competitors. However, what it boils down to is the slightly less than six minute lead that last year's champion, Kim Rudd of Plymouth, has on accomplished runner Elaine Nelson (Grant's wife). Nelson took the lead in the Tri-Loppet during the run – outdistancing Rudd by more than two minutes over the 5K course. But Rudd stormed back during the bike leg – putting over three minutes on Nelson (who was herself one of the fastest bikers), to win by just over a minute and a half.

The 2009 Trail-Loppet should shape up to be quite the competition between these two. Extrapolating from their Tri-Loppet run times, Nelson and Rudd may finish very close in the final Hoigaard's Challenge standings.

And don't forget the third Bearskin Trip – which goes to a randomly selected person who participates in all three Challenge events. Literally anyone can win . . .